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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000128

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SUBJECT: CZECH VIEWS IN ADVANCE OF THE JANUARY 31 GAERC

REF: STATE 9678

Classified By: Political Officer, Kimberly C. Krhounek for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (U) On January 27, conveyed reftel points concerning issues to be raised at the January 31 meeting of the GAERC to Michal Strouhal, Director of the Common Foreign and Security Policy Department at the MFA. Strouhal's responses follow:

1A. (C) TSUNAMI RELIEF: Strouhal said the EU member states were following up on the January 7 extraordinary session of the GAERC on post-tsunami relief with a debate today in Brussels on the proposed EU action plan to assist the region. The major components of the action plan concern mobilization and release of financial resources through the EU budget, debt relief, reconstruction of the primary economic industries of fisheries and beach tourism (Strouhal noted that the Czechs do not have specialized expertise on either to offer, but they hope to be of assistance in reconstruction of water treatment and educational facilities). Strouhal also noted that there is on-going action at the EU-level to develop new mechanisms for civil protection and humanitarian assistance. The Czechs support the concept of a European Voluntary Corps for Humanitarian Aid, although such an organization would have to be coordinated with non-governmental organizations with expertise. There are also ideas under discussion to enhance consular cooperation between the EU and other countries, studies of how military assets can be used in emergency situations and establishment of early warning systems.

1B. (C) TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: Strouhal noted that this is not a topic for this month's GAERC, although it may appear on the February GAERC agenda. Strouhal attended last week's meeting of EU Political Directors in Luxembourg and said that the Europeans also consider President Bush's February visit to be an important event and hope to use it to enhance areas of common approach, as well as debate other areas where our end goals are the same, but the strategies for achieving them may differ (such as Iran and China). Strouhal said that one topic that is increasingly raised during discussions of transatlantic relations is the importance of a common visa regime between the U.S. and all EU member states. (Czech Political Director Jiri Schneider, in a discussion with Pol-Econ Counselor after the PolDir's meeting, also noted the effort to craft a common EU position on travel to the U.S. and said he expected this would become a more prominent element of transatlantic discussions, although surely not during next month's Presidential visit.)

1C. (C) MIDDLE EAST: Strouhal said that the Middle East is on the agenda for the Ministerial lunch. The Czech Republic also appreciated the outcome of the Palestinian elections and the MFA believes that the implementation of security reforms in the PA and direct dialogue between Mahmoud Abbas and Ariel Sharon will be crucial to revitalize the roadmap. The elections demonstrated that political power could legitimately be transferred within the Palestinian territories; another major hurdle will be the reform of the economic infrastructure there.

1D. (C) DESIGNATION OF HIZBALLAH AS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION: Strouhal said that this is an issue under discussion within the EU, but as yet no consensus has been reached to designate the political wing of Hizballah as a terrorist organization. There is a long technical process to add an organization to the terrorist list, and Strouhal believes that there needs to be further debate within the EU how to handle organizations that separate themselves into two wings.

1E. (C) IRAQI ELECTIONS: Strouhal said that the Czech views regarding the importance of the Iraqi elections taking place this weekend are very similar to those of the USG. While the process is made more difficult by the security situation, it is crucial that the Iraqis gain a feeling of full responsibility for the development of their country. It is also important to include Sunni Muslims in the political process and the preparation of the final constitution. Strouhal noted that the GOCR was providing buses to transport Iraqis in the Czech Republic to Germany to vote there in one of the overseas voting centers. He believed that the EU would again be providing some monitors to observe Iraqi voter participation in Iran.

1F. (C) BALKANS: Strouhal said that the Czech Republic

supports all of the recently announced EU measures to help target individuals who do not cooperate with the ICTY. There will be a conclusion concerning progress towards a stabilization and association agreement, and the conclusion will specifically tie this agreement directly to cooperation with the ICTY. Strouhal believes that if Croatia does not arrest Gotovina, it would become an obstacle to the launch of accession negotiations currently scheduled for this March.

G. (C) UKRAINE: Strouhal noted that the present EU-Ukraine Neighborhood Policy and Cooperation Agreement has been adopted for three years. A joint EU-Ukraine Partnership Council is expected to approve it in February. Strouhal said the main areas of concentration are now on Ukraine's need to improve its market economy, membership in the WTO and facilitation of the movement of goods (and possibly people) between the EU and Ukraine. Regarding possible Ukrainian membership in the EU, Strouhal said that Ukraine is now "more realistic" about potential EU membership; as the EU is now occupied with Turkey and Croatia, its capacity to absorb another large (and potentially controversial) member is limited.

H. (C) CUBA: Strouhal said that the "hot issue" for the GAERC is Cuba. The Czechs feel that it is important to have a firm EU declaration at the GAERC, so that Cuba does not see the EU as having a weak position. Currently, the Czechs are trying to influence the compromise language being circulated. FM Svoboda does not want the declaration to focus on who will or will not be invited to national day receptions, which he sees as simply symbolic. Instead the Czechs was clear language explaining the planned structured dialogue between dissidents and EU missions. (According to the MFA America's Department, the Czechs are still debating what sort of statement Svoboda will make at the GAERC on Cuba. Septel will provide additional details on Jan 28.)

I. (C) IRAN: Strouhal said that Iran is not on the agenda for the Monday GAERC. Currently the EU strategy is to approach Iran with "carrots" such as restarting talks about a possible trade and cooperation agreement, but that there will continue to be pressure on Iran on a range of issues from human rights to relations with its neighbors.

J. (C) CHINA: Strouhal believes that an EU decision to lift the arms embargo on China is imminent, likely by March or at this summer's summit. The Czechs share our concerns about human rights and the geopolitical situation in the region. They are still advocating for additional assurances that arms will not flow into China, including having "greater transparency" in arms sales. Strouhal also expressed the hope that if the Toolbox does not provide sufficient safeguards, the EU could still develop a permanent mechanism to ensure that there is no radical export of weapons to the region. He added that the Code of Conduct contains a specific mention of a criteria on human rights. (Czech PolDir Schneider expanded on this in a separate conversation. He noted the Czechs will insist on some human rights improvements in China before agreeing to lift the embargo; stressed that the embargo has been more of a political statement than an effective tool to limit exports to China; and said the Czechs want to make sure that the toolbox requires countries to notify other member states of export approvals, not just denials. Schneider acknowledged that U.S. Congressional reaction, in particular, will be sharp if the embargo is lifted without adequate safeguards in place, and said the GOCR is prepared to be as active as possible in facilitating the dialogue between Washington, Brussels and EU capitals.)

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